# Creating the Future: a 2020 Vision Plan for Library Service in New York State: Recommendations of the New York State Regents Advisory Council on Libraries to the New York State Board of Regents

### Executive Summary

The Regents Advisory Council Vision 2020 Plan presents strategic directions for New York’s libraries and library systems. Developed in partnership with the state’s library community, the Vision 2020 Plan affirms the ongoing value of libraries and provides a clear vision of what excellent libraries should look like. The Plan offers models of success that may be emulated by libraries throughout New York, and makes 60 inter-related strategic recommendations for libraries, library systems, the New York State Library, and the Board of Regents.

Several essential themes run through the Vision 2020 Plan. Foremost, there is a recognition that the state’s 7000 libraries matter very much to the people of New York: libraries represent communities and they empower individuals. Libraries are adapting very quickly to ever-changing technology, and have continued to employ both traditional and contemporary methods to sustain their institutional commitment to several core values shared by all types of libraries. These core values include a commitment to free and open access to information for all people; the understanding that libraries and library professionals  
have the obligation to teach the tools of information literacy so that all users may effectively seek knowledge and skillfully evaluate information as appropriate; and lastly, that the present generation has the responsibility to sustain the principles and institutions of an informed democracy for future generations to come. These themes resonate within this document through each type of library and library system.

The Vision 2020 Recommendations call for a wide range of change, including initiatives to educate the public concerning the role and value of libraries, to meet the challenge of e-resources, to develop enhanced collaborations with other libraries and organizations, to support open content, and to oppose censorship. There are specific recommendations for the various library types (school, academic, public, and special) as well as for library systems and the New York State Library.

This plan makes it clear that libraries – as educational institutions and community centers – are central to the well-being and economic development of the state. While it is difficult to establish priorities for funding during difficult economic times, it makes sense to develop those resources – like libraries and library systems – that are part of the solution to the problems we face as a state and as a nation. The genesis of this planning document was the recognition that significant new state aid was not probable in the near future for libraries. However, it is hoped that this report to the Board of Regents makes clear that without increases in financial support, libraries and library systems cannot be sustained and continue to be responsive to the evolving needs of our state’s residents. The visible and vocal support of the Board of Regents is essential to the success of this effort.

### Introduction

In April 2010, the New York State Board of Regents challenged the library community to rethink the State’s vast array of library services to ensure that they are aligned with modern expectations and the expanded functions needed in today’s society, operate with improved efficiency, and are prepared for the future as an essential and vibrant part of the State’s educational infrastructure.

Working through the Regents Advisory Council, library users, trustees, and staff have spoken out with regard to their libraries, offering not only affirmation of the importance of libraries, but also numerous suggestions for progress and models of success.

### Purpose

The Board of Regents is responsible for the general supervision of all educational activities within the State of New York. The Board of Regents charters public and association libraries, as well as Pre K-12 schools, colleges and universities, and cultural institutions, both public and private, which operate school, academic and special libraries as a critical component of their educational programs and services. The Board of Regents also oversees the New York State Library and the 73 library systems that tie  these libraries and other special libraries - located in hospitals, courts, businesses, government agencies, prisons and other public and private organizations - together into a robust statewide network of some 7,000 libraries. The Board of Regents must also articulate and promote a vision that inspires and promotes excellence in all the educational institutions within its purview.

Though the original charge for this effort was for “Vision 2020,” we believe that the future of libraries can be found right before us in the remarkable work currently being done by visionary librarians, library staff and trustees who understand the needs of their constituents and respond with innovation and service.

Therefore, the primary purpose of this document is to provide the Board of Regents with a clear vision of what excellent libraries should look like and to offer models of success that may be emulated by libraries throughout New York. Specific Regents’ policy suggestions that would move this vision forward are noted where appropriate.

### Libraries – An Investment in Our Future

Libraries provide the physical and virtual spaces that are an integral part of an overarching system that provides continuous opportunities for learning from birth to senior age. By offering all New Yorkers the opportunity to acquire the knowledge they need to be informed and engaged participants in an open democracy, libraries empower individuals.  Library “profit” is demonstrated through both the promotion of economic enterprise and the social return on investment.

Libraries continue to undergo tremendous transition as they move to virtual services in response to changes in technology and the expectations of their patrons, and as they facilitate not only the use of existing information, but also production of new information through online communities and efforts to preserve local history.

One significant change is the increasing convergence among traditionally different types of libraries in the services they offer. Such convergence includes online access to digital resources, the re-tasking of library space, the need for staff skilled in virtual librarianship and collaborative learning, as well as more customary types of service.

Because of the continuing centrality, complexity and diversity of today's knowledge creation and information distribution environments, it is important that our students and residents be equipped with both print and digital literacy skills -- how to find, evaluate, and effectively use information from a variety of sources and formats. Literacy – and in particular digital literacy -- lies at the heart of the mission of all libraries.

Regardless of the many levels of technological change, libraries remain the embodiment of Americans’ “right to educate themselves,” a critical necessity in a knowledge economy where everyone must relentlessly improve their skills throughout their lifetime. The library is what makes lifelong learning for all residents both possible and practical, including, and perhaps especially, for those with special challenges such as the disabled, homeless and economically disadvantaged. People unable to respond to new challenges and invest in their own abilities are likely to become an economic liability, unable to participate fully in society.

Libraries continue to represent a community investment in a vision of a better tomorrow through sharing information, knowledge and, hopefully, wisdom. They are the repositories for the collective memory of our communities, our state, and our nation, and offer us an institution that reflects the American dream of self-help and equity.

Today’s libraries are busier and more vibrant than ever because of, not in spite of, the dramatic impact of digital technology. But even though they have a well established and well respected brand, libraries suffer from outdated public attitudes based on misperceptions that are limited to their traditional roles, stereotypes and the constant assault of competing commercial information providers.

**School Libraries (P-12)**

School libraries are deeply engaged in the implementation of the [New York State P-12 Common Core Learning Standards](http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/common_core_standards/" \t "_blank).xternal link opens in a new windowThere is a well documented connection between student achievement and effective school libraries. The role of school librarians is evolving as they teach students information literacy to be savvy information consumers, producers and judges of appropriate content in all formats. School librarians increasingly collaborate with teachers in designing curricula, developing learning experiences, and providing technical infrastructure that are ideally placed to support differentiated instruction and facilitate special programs for the gifted as well as students with special needs. The school librarian is unique in that he/she addresses the depth and breadth of the entire curriculum, and leads in teaching a 21st Century curriculum of inquiry, problem solving and content creation.

**Models for Success:**

The best school libraries are fully integrated into the P-12 learning experience and are at the hub of each campus, reaching into every classroom as well as into students’ homes. Based on the research findings of the recent [Information Brief: The Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement](http://www.nycomprehensivecenter.org/initiatives/inits_elearn/resources" \t "_blank) published by the NY Comprehensive Center (August,  2011), it is clear that with the shift to the Common Core Standards and a commitment to five key elements of the Regents reform agenda, school libraries with certified school librarians play an important role in student achievement, curriculum development and instruction. Information and digital literacy is recognized as a critical aspect of each student’s education. The school librarian is a true educational partner with every teacher and administrator in providing the best possible learning experience for each child.

**Recommendations:**

The Board of Regents and State Education Department should formulate policy and regulation that will:

* Adopt and implement a statewide information fluency curriculum framework, aligned with the [New York State P-12 Common Core Learning Standards](http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/common_core_standards/" \t "_blank), which, through certified school librarians and a strong library program, will provide equitable access to information and digital literacy instruction and tools. Such a framework will further the schools’ ultimate goal of preparing students, beginning at the elementary level, with the literacy and digital skills and knowledge needed for career or college. (10)
* Expand the existing Commissioner’s Regulations ([91.2](http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/excerpts/finished_regs/912.htm" \t "_blank)) to require an elementary school librarian in every school to strengthen instructional leadership in meeting the P-12 Common Core Learning Standards, and enforce library staffing regulations in all public schools. (11)
* Create incentives to encourage school districts to actively expand and promote access to the school library collection of online resources, e-books, and Web 2.0 tools, available 24/7, to create learning and enrichment opportunities that reach beyond the school day and encourage year-round learning.  (12)
* Create incentives to encourage school districts to adopt flexible scheduling to support full academic day access to school librarians, school library resources and information and digital literacy instruction.  (13)
* Create incentives for school libraries to collaborate with other libraries and communities (such as public libraries, university and community college libraries) to result in full-time, full-year access to information that will further opportunities for all students. (14)